

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PA-02 ICA-20 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00
NSC-05 AGRE-00 EB-08 OMB-01 TRSE-00 PC-05 AID-05
HA-05 IO-14 /086 W
-----016205 150844Z /15

R 131630Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY BANJUL
TO AMEMBASSY DAKAR
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 5787

UNCLAS BANJUL 1171

DAKAR FOR PAO

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W AND AF/P, COOK

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINR GA
SUBJ: GENERAL BRIEFING STATEMENT FOR MISS LILLIAN VISIT

1. ABOUT THE SIZE OF CONNECTICUT, THE GAMBIA HAS A POPULATION OF APPROXIMATELY 570,000. THE COUNTRY IS HEAVILY AGRICULTURAL, DEPENDING ON THE EXPORT OF PEANUTS (GROUNDNUTS) FOR OVER 90 PER CENT OF ITS FOREIGN EXCHANGE EARNINGS. PER CAPITA INCOME, AT ABOUT DOLS 150 ANNUALLY, PLACES THE GAMBIA ON THE LIST OF "LEAST DEVELOPED" COUNTRIES. SITUATED JUST SOUTH OF THE SAHELIAN ZONE, THE GAMBIA HAS BEEN SEVERELY EFFECTED BY DROUGHT. ITS PEANUT PRODUCTION FOR 1977 WAS 35 PER CENT BELOW NORMAL, CAUSING A SHARP DROP IN EXPORT EARNINGS.

2. ONE OF THE MOST STABLE COUNTRIES IN WEST AFRICA, THE GAMBIA IS FIRMLY COMMITTED TO THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS AND FULLY RESPECTS HUMAN RIGHTS. SIR DAWDA JAWARA, THE GAMBIA'S LEADER SINCE BEFORE INDEPENDENCE, WON REELECTION TO A NEW FIVE YEAR TERM IN 1977, IN AN OPEN CLOSELY FOUGHT PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION. THE COUNTRY BOASTS A FREE PRESS, LIBERAL ECONOMIC POLICIES, AN INDEPENDENT

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DENT JUDICIARY, AND AN ACTIVE OPPOSITION. WITHOUT MILITARY FORCES, THE GAMBIA'S SECURITY IS MAINTAINED BY A SMALL, EFFECTIVE POLICE FORCE OF 1000 MEN.

3. THE GAMBIA'S CURRENT FIVE YEAR PLAN WAS CONCEIVED DURING THE DROUGHT PERIOD OF THE EARLY 1970'S. IT PLACES GREAT STRESS ON IMPROVING THE CONDITIONS OF LIFE IN THE RURAL SECTOR, INCLUDING

AUGMENTED FOOD PRODUCTION AND PREVENTIVE HEALTH CARE. ALL GOVERNMENT PLANNING, WHICH CHANNELS FOREIGN DONOR ASSISTANCE, IS DESIGNED TO INSULATE THE COUNTRY FROM FURTHER CONSEQUENCES OF DROUGHT. FOOD STORAGE FACILITIES ARE UNDER CONSTRUCTION, THE ROAD NETWORK IS BEING EXPANDED, AND RICE PRODUCTION PROJECTS ARE UNDERWAY. THESE ARE AMONG EXAMPLES WHICH REPRESENT A RATIONAL MARSHALLING OF DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL RESOURCES IN POSITIVE DIRECTIONS, IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT DROUGHT-RELATED EXPERIENCE.

4. US ASSISTANCE TO THE GAMBIA IS INCREASING SIGNIFICANTLY, AND WILL AMOUNT TO APPROXIMATELY 3 MILLION DOLLARS IN THE CURRENT FISCAL YEAR. IN RESPONSE TO RENEWED DROUGHT DURING 1977, AID HAS PROVIDED 2000 TONS OF FOOD GRAINS IN DIRECT BILATERAL ASSISTANCE TO THE GAMBIA FOR FREE DISTRIBUTION TO HUNGRY FARMERS. AN EQUAL AMOUNT HAS BEEN US DONATED VIA THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAM. NEARLY ONE HALF MILLION DOLLARS HAS BEEN OBLIGATED TO ASSIST THE GAMBIA'S CROP PROTECTION UNIT, TO BE USED FOR COMMODITIES AND TRAINING. USAID RECENTLY CONCLUDED THE FIRST SIGNIFICANT US-GAMBIAN BILATERAL PROJECT AGREEMENT, WHICH ENVISAGES THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SOIL AND WATER MANAGEMENT UNIT IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, TRAINING FOR GAMBIAN PERSONNEL, AND DEVELOPING TECHNOLOGY FOR IMPROVED UTILIZATION OF RURAL WATER RESOURCES. TECHNICIANS FOR THIS PROJECT ARE NOW BEING RECRUITED, AND SHOULD BE IN PLACE BY AUTUMN. AID HAS FUNDED CONSTRUCTION OF A DOLS 250,000 NATIONAL TRAINING CENTER TO TRAIN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORKERS, AND IS FINANCING SEVERAL GAMBIAN STUDENTS

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UNDER THE AFRICAN MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT PROJECT. SINCE 1972, THE AID-FUNDED MATERNAL/CHILD HEALTH PROJECT (CONTRACTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT SANTA CRUZ) HAS SPENT OVER ONE MILLION DOLLARS FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, TRAINING, AND COMMODITIES TO SUPPORT A PROGRAM FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH NURSES. CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES OPERATES A REGULAR PL-480 (TITLE II) FEEDING PROGRAM TO FURTHER BETTER NUTRITION FOR MOTHERS AND PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN, AT AN AID-FUNDED COST OF ABOUT DOLS 400,000 PER YEAR.

5. PEACE CORPS HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN THE GAMBIA FOR THE PAST DECADE. IT IS THE MOST VISIBLE ASPECT OF THE U.S. PRESENCE IN THE GAMBIA, AND ENJOYS AN EXCELLENT REPUTATION. THERE ARE CURRENTLY 26 VOLUNTEERS AND 10 TRAINEES WORKING IN THE PROGRAM. RECENT EMPHASIS HAS BEEN TO PLACE MORE VOLUNTEERS IN RURAL AREAS. UP COUNTRY VOLUNTEERS INCLUDE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORKERS, SMALL BUSINESS ADVISORS, AND ONE SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION EXPERT. BANJUL AND ENVIRONS HOST TEACHERS, HEALTH WORKERS, SMALL BUSINESS ADVISORS, CITY PLANNERS, AND TWO ARCHIVISTS. WYGANT

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: VISITS, BRIEFING MATERIALS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 13 jul 1978
Decapton Date: 01 jan 1960
Decapton Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 jan 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BANJUL01171
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780290-0789
Format: TEL
From: BANJUL
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780766/aaaacdoe.tel
Line Count: 112
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 43c47e76-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2027130
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GENERAL BRIEFING STATEMENT FOR MISS LILLIAN VISIT
TAGS: PINR, GA, (CARTER, LILLIAN)
To: DAKAR
Type: TE
vdkgvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/43c47e76-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014